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Statement submitted by Brothers of Charity, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

No health without mental health

Brothers of Charity is a strong international partner supporting human rights for mental health in developing and emerging countries.

Since its founding in the early nineteenth century, the organization has been advocating that mental health care should become an integral part of primary health care. In Belgium, Brothers of Charity has developed a network of mental health care in the field of prevention, treatment and care, with adapted programmes for those with acute and chronic psychiatric problems.

Brothers of Charity tries to eliminate the existing discrimination against people with a mental illness, both in society and in health-care institutions. As an international organization, it is present in 30 countries. Local chapters run programmes adapted to specific geographical and cultural contexts. The congregation is still growing, especially in Asia and Africa. The experience of Brothers of Charity in those 30 countries highlights the need to continue the difficult task of integrating mental health care in a country's general health-care system.

The organization's strategy to improve mental health care in low-income countries is based on its vision of love and compassion for the poor and sick. The strategy has five main goals: (a) changing the general perception of and attitudes towards psychiatric illness and psychiatric patients; (b) integrating the care of psychiatric patients into existing general health-care programmes; (c) developing adapted treatment and care for different types of mental diseases at different levels; (d) training local health-care workers in mental health care as the cornerstone; and (e) building a strong international structure and organization, focused on quality, continuity and solidarity.

The Superior General of the organization, Brother René Stockman, emphasizes how mental health is important to the overall approach of the Millennium Development Goals and to the struggle against poverty in general. With its basic attitude of love, Brothers of Charity has developed great competence in the field of mental health care worldwide. Love and professionalism are not in opposition to each other, but are logically related. It is through this professionalism that the organization can show society that people with a mental disorder are also human beings; they are ill people, who need our care and our support. That is precisely the reason why its strategy always starts with the care of chronic psychiatric patients, because those people are the most forgotten ones. By taking care of them, the organization can have a direct impact on the perception of and attitudes towards mental illness.

By trying to bring chronic psychiatric patients back into society, Brothers of Charity gives a strong signal to society to change its perception of and attitudes towards psychiatric patients, who are often seen as possessed people and are therefore marginalized and stigmatized.